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ABSTRACT

Papers presented at a roundtable session on research on reading at the 1985 International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) conference provide an international and historical perspective on reading. They include: (1) "Research on Reading in Czechoslovakia" (H. Kolarova-Palkova, Czechoslovakia), a historical account of the development of reading habits and interests; (2) "Current Research on the Reading Interests of Young People in North America" (Adele M. Fasick, Canada), an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of various methods used to obtain information about young people's reading interests; (3) "IFLA's Round Table on Research in Reading: An Introduction" (Paul Kaegbein, West Germany), a description of the establishment of this IFLA Round Table, its aims and goals, and the results of its first meeting in the spring of 1985; and (4) "The Adolescent Reading Transition: Towards the Definition of a Problem" (Bryan Luckham, United Kingdom), an exploration of issues which might form the basis of an IFLA-sponsored comparative international research investigation into the reading habits of young people. (THC)

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Research of reading in Czechoslovakia

by

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51st General Conference of IFLA ,Chicago,1985

Round Table : RESEARCH ON READING

Research of reading in Czechoslovakia

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Research of reading in Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia is a country with rich traditions; it is the country with the first university in Middle Europe, with a high level of architecture, literature, music culture etc. The general atmosphere was favourable for the development of reading culture of the society as well. However, the way of cultural development of both the nations, the Czech and the Slovak was not easy, up to 1918, when they formed a common state.

Genesis and forming of reading culture have very ancient traditions, their beginnings belonging up to the period of national revival, developing in Bohemia, as well as in Slovakia since the begin of the 19th century. Within the frame of national revival, also experiments were formed of organized reading, together with the first beginnings of considerations on the societal culture of reading. Inspirators of the movement of readership were, first of all, teachers, who made accessible school libraries to adult inhabitants and founded readers´circles.

The period since 1918 was preparing for forming an organized network of public libraries. Uniting the two nations, the Czech and the Slovak to an autonomous state, gave favourable conditions for the development of national culture. One of the first library laws in the world from 1919, ensured real conditions for developing readership culture in Czechoslovakia.

Simultaneously, the period since 1918 up to world war 2 nd, was also the period of arising deeper theoretical bases of librarianship, and, among others, also of the sciences on the reader. First investigations arise, having the character of individual creating. Dominant subject of the investigations, there was reading

of children and adolescents. The investigators concentrated their work to readership´s interest in dependence on age, sex, milieu, intelligence, profession, moreover to the motives of reading, to the place of reading in the spare time, popularity of single authors or literary species. Authors of the investigations were, first of all, teachers, having qualification for "writership" and the oportunity to realize their research work in the school. Investigations on reading of adults are not numerous, but they are important for containing large populations in question, markedly selecting the actual problematics as the subject of their research work and reflecting in a rexlatively adequate way the level of readership in the period since 1918 up to the 2 nd world war.

The 2nd world war brought stagnation into the cultural life.

A new stage of the development of cultural life began in Czechoslovakia after the liberation in 1945, but, first of all, after the Socialist revolution in 1948. As early as in 1948, a number of measures was issued dealing with organization an planning of the work with books and with the general participation of the broadest masses at the cultural life of the society. When compared with the individual research of the former period, research work after the 2nd world war obtains collective character, the coordinating functions being assumed by institutions as the "Central scientifically-methodical cabinet for librarian work" "Ústredný vedecko-metodický kabinet pre knižničnú prácu", /which arose within the frame of the State library in Prague, fulfilling also the function of the National library in Bohemia,/ and the "Scientifically methodical cabinet of the Matica slovenská" /arisen 5

within the frame of the Matica slovenská, which fulfils also the function of the National library in Slovakia/, and by other institutions as the Slovak Academy of sciences, the chair of book science and scientific informations of the Comenius University, the Pedagogical library, the Municipal library in Bratislava. After the 2nd world war, a new asepct starts to be underlined within the research of readership, - its near connection with sociology. In connection with this, the importance of general theoretical work decreases and publications are wanted more and more with empirical character and with using sociological methods.

In the following period some characteristical accesses can be distinguished to the problematics of investigating readership:

1. Solving psychological problems of reading,
2. Reading of children as a subject of research,
3. Contacts of the youths with books,
4. Culture of readership of the adults as an object of research interests.

In the first sphere, presumptions were stated of the influence of books on the reader. The author of one of such works, M. Nákonečný /journal "Psychológie čitateľa", 1965-1966/, delimits understanding reader´s psychology, its object, system and its methods. In his opinion, reading is a sociogenic need, having limited aim, intensity and lasting. Among the basic problems of reader´s psychology he classes: - choosing of lecture - reading - effect /the aspect of succession in time/, - reader - book /aspect of communicativity/, - conserving - experience /psychological aspect/.

The most practical contribution of his work is represented 6

by its part dedicated to the method of investigating readership /inquiry, experiment, sociometrical methods, content analysis of reading, evaluation of personalities/.

Cf forming theoretical bases of librarianship, there deserved well F. Hyhlík, author of numerous works in the sphere of pedagogical psychology of the reader in different age groups. His work is synthetized in the publication "Psychology of the young reader" /1963/. It bases on general psychology, containing psychological characteristics of children and youth, paying attention especially to empirical investigating adolescents. At the same time, the author bases on his former works, dealing with the pedagogical importance of librarian´s work with the youth.

Into the group of contributions in this sphere, there belongs also studying effectivity of reading, presented by C. Kurucová in her study using as an example the reception of E. M. Remarque´s book "The three comrades", entitled "Investigation of social effectivity of reading" /1969/. The author strived for explaining the influence of reading on the psyche of the reader and his activity during reading. The work is a contribution, first of all, in the methodological sphere, due to using standardized conversation and due to the interessant typology of the acceptors of the books. Kurucová left stereotypical methods of investigating populerity of an author and showed the possibility to embroaden the science on readers on the base of intensive studies of the reception of one book.

An interessant tendency of research after the 2nd world war is represented by continuating the bibliopsychological studies of Rubakin. One of the typical representants of this trend is V. Smeták, who pays attention, first of all, to the research of text 7

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reading. In his opinion, theory of reading represents a conglomerate of different research spheres and problems, as: theory of the text, models of reading, theory of readers´interests and of lecture, differences among readers, rate of reading and understanding the text, work with special readers and bibliotherapy.

Psychological aspects can be found also in many other works investigating problems of reading, first of all from the viewpoint of sociology or pedagaogics.

The second sphere of research after the 2nd world war was represented by reading of children. In the fifties, important scientific publications appeared of numerous authors; among them gained considerable celebrity A. Jurovský in Slovakia, and F. Hyhlík in Bohemia. The publications of Jurovský are characterized by methodological originality an by skilful using of empirical material. František Hyhlík was interested in the readership of the youth in adolescence.

Besides the works of these two authors, many smaller contributions appeared, paying attention to the traditional problem of readers´interest under the new societal conditions /e.g. Chudíková, Boroš/. After 1960, the complexity of phenomena connected with reading is taken into account more and more, and more importance is ascribed to comparative research. Step by step, the growing importance is considered of printed matter, broadcasting, film, and television in relation to reading.

The contacts of children up to 15 years with books were object of interest of a collective of workers of the Matica slovenská in the work: "Representation and using of literature for the youth in public libraries of communities up to 1000 inhabitants /1966/, /"Zastúpenie a využívanie literatúry pre mládež

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dových knižniciach v obciach do 1000 obyvateľov"/.

An example for the application of the comparative method to readers of the same age is given by S. Pilková in her work on the interests of 13 years old children /"Studies from investigating reader´s interest"/"Štúdie z průskumu čtenářskeho zájmu, 1969/.

Aim of the investigation was comparing of the indexes of reading of the children in Prague between 1966-1967, with the indexes of anaological investigations of O. Chaloupka at the problem character of the statistical analysis in contrast to a simple description, as well as the concentration to a single year of childrens´age, were of positive influence to penetrating into the problematics.

Precise sociological investigations of the interests of pupils of the 5-9 classes of primary schools were made in the commom work of A. Rišková and V. Holina in their contribution "Readership interests of pupils and their relation to the journal "Pionierske noviny" /"Čitateľské záujmy žiakov a ich vzťah k Pionierskym novinám", 1968/. Aim of the investigation was analysing of the relationship of pupils of higher classes of primary schools to the tools of mass comunication, first of all to printed matter. The following institutions participated at organizing of this research: editorial board of the Pionierske noviny, The journalist study institute and the Research institute of childrens´psychology and psychopathology. The work contains a number of precise indices, gives a general picture of journalological interests of the adolescents and determines the social determinants of readership of the mentioned newspapers.

Investigations based on a broad population of pupils from the 9

5-9th classes of primary schools, with using sociological methods are presented by H. Holinová in her contribution "Relation of children to the tools of mass communication as a research problem /"Vzťah detí k masovokomunikačným prostriedkom ako výskumný problém", 1973/. The author analyzed here the relation of children to the tools of mass comunication, among them also to the book. She investigated the contact of children with the printed word on the base of the total picture of cultural activity of children. This research work is of value from the viewpoint of investigating the problems of reading, of their social conditions and of the aspect of integral education. The work of Holinová is also of practical importance, completing breaks in the Slovak literature, where investigations in question were lacking, concerning the relation of schoolgoing children to the editors.

In 1972, the department of literature for the youth of the Municipal library organized in cooperation with the chair of bibliology and scientific informations in Bratislava, a seminar on investigating the theme of readership of girls /Križanová, Lobotková, Vráblová, Pavlová/. Research work on this sphere, proved that it is desirable and right, when those, who organise readership, claim for specific novels for girls, who will fulfil in the future not only the function of a woman and mother, but also of a woman active as expert.

E. Mešša tried to synthetize the problems of working with the book amorg children and the youth; he is author of numerous contributions in the field of directing readership. With respect to the complicated problem of reading, he chooses only some of the themes: evaluation of the methods of working with children, pro-

blems of working with the book at the single degrees of scholar and extrascholar library organizations, problems of development of the theory of literature for the youth; these problems are explained, first of all, from the viewpoint of organization.

A special group of problems is represented by works at the field of literature for children. The books edited at the early seventies by C. Chaloupka, B. Nezkusil and V. Stejskal are of especially high level. Of the nearest connection with problems of reading is the work of C. Chaloupka "Horizonts of readership" /"Horizonty čtenářství", 1971/. Object of his interest was the problem of recepting literature by children in adolescence, as he concentrates his attention to children of 10-15 years. The author claims for taking into account developmental prospectives of the relation of the child to the book in literary education, by leading them from the lower stage of development to the higher one.

In the second work of this period "Contreversy on the specificity of children´s literature"/"Spor o špecifičnosť detskej literatúry"/, the author B. Nezkusil shows, that the hitherto existing psychologizing, overdidactized and moralizing access to children´s literature is not adequate. It accentuates too much emotional reactions of the child and points at real proves. The author desires to take into account the creative element, which represents the base of evoking estetically-emotional experiences of the reader, to the same extent. As the elements realizing practical and percepting functions.

The further work from the theory of children´s literature "Fight for a proper voice of the author" /"Zápas o vlastný hlas

autora"/, by V. Stejskal, points at forming of the children´s book.

Results of the works on this field, show that history and theory of literature for children and the youth develops very intensively in Czechoslovakia during the last decades. In their theoretical and research works, the authors base on marxistic methodology as the fundament of their works.

The third sphere of research work represents the contacts of the youth with the book. Already at the time between the two world wars, youth at the age of adolescing was separated from children, and special attention has been paid to it. Dominating research theme were literary interests. This traditional problem was elaborated at the further time by M. Nákonečný in his work "Literary interests of the studying youth" /"Literárne záujmy študujúcej mládeže", 1962/. The author organized a typical inquiry investigation among the students of the Universities in Prague, as well as among absolvents of secondary schools, for finding out differences between reading of boys and girls. He stated the interests of the youth to be determined by such conditions, as the editorial plan or the possibility to loan books. The conclusions of these investigations were courageous and interesting, however without serious proving importance, as they were realized on a small population of respondents.

At the end of the fifties, the problematics of investigation began to differentiate markedly. J. Veľkoborský presented a new psychological problem in his article "Influence of the example of literary heroes on the development of character features of the working youth" /"Vplyv príkladu literárnych hrdinov na rozvoj charakterných rysov pracujúcej mládeže"/. However, the hypotheses of 12

this influence were not real in general, as it is difficult to eliminate the influence of other factors. The contribution of Veľkoborský consists, first of all, in looking for new research methods.

A new theme "The function of libraries in satisfying readers' need" was elaborated by M. Nádvorník in his work "The youth in the system of differentiated work with the reader" /"Mládež v systéme diferencovanej práce s čitateľom", 1969/. He wrote about the need of differentiated services for the youth in libraries with enlightenmental character. The aim was optimal satisfying readers' needs and enforcing didactical influence of reading.

Since the middle sixties, a new tendency manifested in acquiring contacts with the printed word on the base of the general picture of the cultural life of the youth. In Bohemia and Slovakia first attempts appeared to characterize the culture of spare time of the youth.

A. Jurovský, expert for problems of social psychology, concludes in his work "Cultural profile of our apprentice youth" /"Kultúrny profil našej učňovskej mládeže", 1965/ that a considerable part of the working youth in Slovakia is without an adequate relation to the book. He emphasized the importance of didactical work convincing working men on the value of books.

In his broader investigation "Cultural development of the youth" /"Kultúrny vývin mládeže"/ Jurovský observes a group of working youth between 1960 and 1961. He was interested in the participation of the individual at culture, basing on the use of different forms of culture communication, on the degree of information and orientation in the different spheres. Jurovský underlined

that investigating cultural activities of the youth in its apapre-time is of psychologically-theoretical and pedagogically-practical importance. His work is charakterized by methodological invention, originality, scientific proving importance and reality.

In Bohemia, broad research work was realized by J. Jedlička on a population of young people between 16 and 18 years. He published his results in his work "Reading of the youth in relation to the tools of mass comunication" /"Čítanie mládeže vo vzťahu k moderným prostriedkom masovej komunikácie", 1967/. Aim of the investigation was to state the position of book and press on the background of the other tools of mass communication. The work contains a number of detailed conclusions and indices, which are of interest for those, who organize participation at culture.

The research work of Jurovský concerning Slovak youth and that of Jedlička on the Czech one, complete the ones the others and show genereal convergency in many moments.

The broadest population of youth with respect to its age, is concerned by a research from 1971, realized by the Ministery of culture of the Czech socialist republic in cooperation with the Socialist federation of youth. The work was published under the title "Youth and culture" /"Mládež a kultúra"/. Reading is here shown as one of the spare time intersts of the youth betwen 15-24 years. Aim of the investigation was the analysis of present relations of the youth of different social classes and different milieus, in relation to selected cultural values, together with the analysis of typical needs and interests of young people and its satisfying. Diagnoses of needs and interests of the Czech

youth, perception of its opinions on the theme of the activity of cultural enlightening centers, these are factors contributing to rational planning of work and to a fuller realization of participating at culture.

Besides the works dedicated exclusively to the cultural activity of the youth, there exist also such ones, which deliberate on the reading of a single species of literature, connecting together different groups of age. The social problem of the readership of technicians was investigated by Z. Ondrejčeková in her work "Reading of technicians" /"Čítanie technikov"/. This work contains numerous detailed indices, concerning the amount of spare time dedicated to reading, as well as forming of directions of interest, loaning of books etc.; this can be useful for comparing the situation, after a certain time had passed. Among the results of research work concerning the relation of the youth to the book, certain differences occur, which cannot be explained only by the time interval or by the realized progress. It might be supposed that investigations performed on different populations using only few categories of variable quantities, do not give bases for comparing results and their generalization.

The last sphere of research work of this period are investigations of the reading culture of adults. In this sphere, object of interest was the social importance of reading and the social function of libraries.

The first research concerning the whole region with the analysis of readership situation was performed in the country.

Of large importance are the results of the work of A. Kuruc, presented in his work "Readers´s situation at the Slovak village"

/"Čitateľská situácia na slovenskej dedine", 1964/:

- it is possible to increase intensity of reading by suitable organization,
- it is necessary to except librarians from sideline functions,
- special attention must be paid to working men and farmers,
- propagation of reading must be developed,
- the quality of extrabelletristic literature must be supervised.

These results were obtained on the base of individual reserch work.

In the fifties, large interest arose at enlightenment of the adults, at stating the degree of satisfying cultural needs and interests of the working people by libraries, as well as at the ways of their more effective influencing.

Then soundings were realized, dealing with certain partial tasks. Of broadest importance were investigations on the social acting of literature in Slovakia, organized by the Matica slovenská and the Center of book culture /Ústredie knižnej kultúry/. Aim of the investi gations was to confront individual reader´s interests with supposed social aims, as well as looking for the possibility of actual realizing the educating function of reading. The results of empirical investigations enabled the authors to state that, from the viewpoint of reading, Slovakia belongs to the group of culturally progressive countries, in spite of the fact that this level could be even higher.

Basing on the material obtained in this way, I. Geguš investigated the interest for press among the inhabitants of Slovakia. Object of the analysis was the extent of reading press, readers´ activity, interest for actual titles in the local and regional press, preference of readers etc. In the opinion of the author, propaga- 16

ting of the press and of the book are dependent upon the same factors, but their influence on reading books manifests more markedly. Most interest is given to daily newspapers and to illustrated and humoristical journals. Reading intensity of special journals is differentiated in dependence on education and specialization.

In connection with the interest for the cultural level of adults, a collective research work was organized within the frame of a whole society's plan: "Pedagogics of adults, basic theoretical and methodological problems of educating adults" /"Pedagogika dospelých, základné teoretické a metodologické problémy výchovy dospelých"/. Research work proceeded in two steps. The first one concerned the country milieu, the second one the inhabitants of towns in 1966-68. The results of investigations in the country milieu were evaluated by D. Vančura, V. Hihlíková and M. Velinský in Bohemia and by C. Žuffa in Slovakia. As starting point for the supposition was accepted that social progress, changes in the economical, social and political life are reflected by the tasks and contents of the cultural and enlightening work, and among them by the activity of libraries. Aim of the research was delimiting of the social function of libraries in education and instruction of adults, determination of a perspective direction of further development of library services, means, forms and methods of their work, as well as elaborating an analysis of the forms of directing and planning library work, that were efficient in their development. Realizing centers were the Matica slovenská and the State library of the Czech socialist republic. Searching in the terrain proved the large importance of public libraries in the country. They are

the richest, best organized and most competently functionning institutions among all cultural and enlightening institutions at the village. Within the hierarchy of popular activities performed in the spare time, reading is at the first place. Public libraries can influence indeed education and enlightenment of the adults under the presumption of rebuilding structure and contents of the library fund, which often is obsolete and does not satisfy the needs. Qualification of the librarian is here of most importance.

The investigations are of importance from the viewpoint of using equal methods in the country in Bohemia and in Slovakia, making possible comparing the situation of readership. The second step of investigations concerned the social function of libraries in towns, being most important in educating and instructing adults. The structure of the readership in the investigated centers, differred from the structure of the inhabitants - youth and children were markedly more represented. Simultaneously as in the country, reading is the most preferred cultural activity in the spare time also in the town. Among the different functions of the book, its entertaining function was dominant. For the respondents, reading was a kind of entertainment, by which they compensate lack of the every days life. This research work is of high metodological level, with emphasis to social benefit, right organization of collective work at the time of planning, as well as in realizing investigations themselves. Data obtained by this research, class Czechoslovakia to a high level of activity of public libraries and of reading culture of its inhabitants.

At the last sixties intensive, research in journalistic sciences developes. Special activita was performed by V. Holina .

in this sphere. The broadest area of the problematics is comprehended in his work "Readers of press in Slovakia" /"Čitatelia tlače na Slovensku", 1970/. He worked under the direction of the Institute of journalistic studies. His investigations proved the accepted hypothesis, reading of press to be a manifestation of cultural activity, representing a positive base of other interests of this type. Tools of mass communication stimulate to a large extent interpersonal communication, which influences forming of standpoints and opinions. Among them, press is of the largest influence.

Holina elaborated several work in the sphere of investigating perception of press, e.g. reading of daily newspapers and humoristic journals. His work serves to questions of propagation and popularization of the printed word.

During the past decade, research on reading and readers improved, first of all, qualitatively. One began to carry to them on a solid institutional base /Matica slovenská, State library of the Czech socialist republic/, with qualified workers of the institutions in question as cooperators. Moreover, much research work is planned also as state problems.

In Slovakia much work was done at this sphere by the Matica slovenská and its research department. Within the frame of the state scientifical research problem "Pedagogics of the adult - forming of the adult in the socialist society in his spare time", the investigation was realized on the theme "Place of libraries in political education and instructing of adults" /"Miesto knižníc v politickej výchove a vzdelávaní dospelých"/. Results of this research were worked up by the coworkers of the research department of the Matica slovenská in 1975 /Čipka, Horáková, Šimo, Panáková/. Aim of

the work was an analysis of the unified system of libraries in Slovakia from the viewpoint of work with political literature, statement of readers´needs and claims of adult readers, as well as elaborating a theoretical model of work with political literature in the libraries, as an information source on it. The research work brought the statement, political literature to be an important part of readers´interests and the interest of readers to be concentrated to the political problematics of the present time.

In 1976, Matica slovenská began to solve the state scientifical research problém "Culture as a forming factor in the process of creating the socialist profile of social classes and groups" /"Kultúra ako formotvorný činiteľ v procese utvárania socialistického profilu spoločenských tried a skupín"/, gestor of which was the Research institute of culture in Bratislava. Within this problem some research work was done. First of them was "Investigating of activity, forms and methods of work in selected trade-union libraries in Slovakia" /"Prieskum činnosti foriem a metód práce vybraných odborárskych knižníc na Slovensku"/ by the authors V. Čipka and V. Šimo. Its aim was to investigate forms and methods of work with working men in trade-union libraries, and to propose adequate means for increasing effectivity of the influence of books in the milieu of workers. This material brought the possibility to compare the work of professionalized trade-union libraries with trade-union libraries with voluntary librarians. Knowledges obtained on the base of statistical data, of informations and personal experiences, show, activities, forms and methods of work in professionalized trade-union libraries to be at a higher level, in

spite of the fact, that not everything is yet satisfactory.

Aim of the secondwork elaborated in 1979 by V. Čipka "Investigating the work of public libraries with readers - agricultural workers" /"Prieskum práce ľudových knižníc s čitateľmi - pracovníkmi v poľnohospodárstve"/ was to state the situation in these libraries, successes, but also lacks and problems, which must be solved in the interest of increasing the influence of the book, - of reading and of public libraries, - on forming the socialist cultural profile of workers in agriculture. Basing on the results of this research work, the author elaborated a proposition of recommends for increasing quality of public libraries in the country.

The last investigation realized within the frame of this problem, was "Readers´activity and culture of basic social classes" /"Čitateľská aktivita a kultúra ~~a kultúra~~ základných spoločenských tried"/ by the authors V. Čipka and Ľ. Horáková /1979/. Aim of this work work was to state participation of the bock at forming of the cultural profile of bhe basic social classes, of workers and workers in agriculture, to find out the place of reading in th spare time of the respondents, the quality of lecture, and the needs and interests of readers, the importance of reading as creative cultural activity, together with its relation to the total social activity of the respondents. The konwledges and data obtained by these authors had to contribute to the realization of effective measures for increasing the effect of the book among real and potencial readers - workers and farmers.

The final summarizing report to this thematical task was elaborated by V. Čipka and Ľ. Horáková, entitled "Importance of the book in the process of forming the socialist cultural profile of the basic social classes" /"Význam knihy v procese utvárania

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socialistického kultúrneho profilu základných spoločenských tried"/ in 1980. The report contains summarized results and conclusions of all research, realized within the frame of this theme.

In 1978-80, the Sector of Research and methodics of the State library of the Czech socialist republic, together with the Matica slovenská, realized an international compering investigation "Dynamics of reading and readers´needs in public libraries", with the State library of V. I. Lenin in Moscow as gestor. It was research work from the viewpoint of reading of the most active part of inhabitants - of readers of libraries. Reading in Czechoslovakia as a social phenomenon is, without doubt, of large importance and it is therefore desirable to form such conditions for its further development, where it will be possible tosatisfy optimally readers´ needs of the socialistic man. The obtained results are of value as a starting point for further investigations of readership. Of equal value are also the first experiences from realizing the international comparative research.

In Bohemia, besides of other institutions, first of all the State library of the Czech socialist library was interested on research of readership. The results of investigations organized by it are the most important contribution in the period of the last 10 years in this field.

In 1977, D. Kupetzová published her results of research on the theme "Investigation of the composition of reading of 12-15 years old readers" /"Prieskum zloženia čítania 12 až 15 ročných čitateľov"/. Aim of this investigation was to find out, to which extent this age category can be classed into the category of adolescent readers. Starting idea was the supposition, the basic cri-

terion for delimiting the category of adolescent readers to be the composition and level of reading. The idea "adolescent reader" indicates a group of youth, for which transition of childrens´ literature is typical to forms and genres of belles-lettres for adults in the sphere of special scientific and imaginative literature. A questionnary was used as method for collecting material, moreover a standardized conversation and the analysis of loans. The results of this research confirmed the starting supposition, the investigated population to represent the category of adolescent readers. In her conclusions, the author proposed measures for optimalization of librarian services for this group of readers.

A very interesting contribution to the knowledge of the child - reader was brought by the results of the research theme "Relation of the child below school age to the book, with emphasis to reading popularly-educating literature" /"Vzťah dieťaťa mladšieho školského veku ku knihe so zreteľom na čítanie populárno-náučnej literatúry"/ published by J. Marhounová. Within this theme, the author worked with 7-11 years old children, with the aim to find out the relation of the reading child to parents, school, success, interests and to the level of reading. This research was continued by investigating the theme /published by the same author/ "Relation of the reader beneath school age to popularly-scientific literature." /"Vzťah čitateľa staršieho školského veku k populárno-náučnej literatúre"/. The investigation followed equal characteristics as its first part. Conclusion of the research is the convincing that it is possible for men to obtain certain books at the right time, whereas the author has the opportunity to express something to the reader, whereas this mental period of the reader does not pass away. It is, therefore, necessary, to follow and scientifically direct

of children.

In 1981, results of the scientific research problem were published "Position of the library in the system of politically educing institutions in the Czech socialist republic and problems of their work with political and sociological literature" /"Postavenie knižnice v systéme politicko-výchovných inštitúcií v ČSR a problémy ich práce s politickou a spoločenskovednou literatúrou"/, part of which was also investigating of the public opinion, of relations of the Czech public to reading, education and libraries. It concerns not only the standpoints of readers of libraries, but also of those, who do not frequent libraries. In relation to the readers, their opinion on using departments of political literature was subject of investigation. It pointed at a considerable interest of the public on political and sociological literature; therefore it is necessary to pay increased attention to the work in departments of political literature.

Within the frame of the scietific research problem, an investigation was elaborated "Working with the youth in public libraries" /"Práce s mládežou vo verejných knižniciach"/ /Sodomková-Vajdová/, with the conclusion that librarian work cannot exist without cooperation with schools of all types and with cultural and social institutions.

During the past ten years, the State library of the Czech socialist republic solved two themes, which are by their contents in direct correlation to the present needs of development of our society. The first of them "Help of public libraries to the development of national economy" /"Pomoc verejných knižníc rozvoju národného hospodárstva"/ followed problems connected immediately with

ensuring and improving of informating activities of libraries. By their solving authentic data were obtained on the present state, on the problems and further trends of developing information work in public libraries. A dominating part of this research was the investigation of the interactive relation between the library /informating institution/ and the reader /user/.

Object of the second research theme was "Investigating the intensity of acting belles-letters on the reader and delimiting the role of public libraries in this process" /"Skúmanie intenzity pôsobenia krásnej literatúry na čitateľa a vymedzenie úloh verejných knižníc v tomto procese"/. Basing on empirical material, this theme had to delimit the participation of libraries at the esthetical education of the inhabitants. At present, its results are worked up; however, it is possible to tell even at present that it will bring a number of knowledges, able to be used in elaborating the state program of esthetical education of the inhabitants.

In the last decade, many libraries and extralibrarian institutions realized a number of investigations in the field of culture, including directly or indirectly the state of reading culture of the society. Such institutions were, besides the libraries of all types, e.g. the Institute for journalistic studies /Novinársky študijný ústav/, the Research institute of culture /Výskumný ústav kultúry/ and the Institute for investigating culture /Ústav pro výzkum kultury/. It is not possible to comprehend all conclusions. The results, however, point at a high and permanently growing readers´culture, and at a cultural level of the

inhabitants in general, classing Czechoslovakia among the well developed socialistic countries.

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Current Research on the Reading Interests of Young People in North America

by

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KEYWORD(S):

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CURRENT RESEARCH ON THE READING INTERESTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN NORTH AMERICA

Abstract

The methods used to obtain information about the reading interests of young people include questionnaires, interviews, diaries, library records, recollection of stories and content analysis. Each method has both advantages and disadvantages. Most studies have focused on the content areas of greatest interest to children and have reported that age and sex are two of the factors related to differences in reading interest. A few studies have looked at the ways in which format, literary style and psychological aspects of books for children affect their popularity. Future research should investigate why children prefer certain types of books rather than just which books they prefer.

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CURRENT RESEARCH ON THE READING OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN NORTH AMERICA

Research on reading has been an important strand of educational research for many years in North America. Each year the International Reading Association publishes a summary of investigations relating to reading for the previous year. This summary includes studies done by scholars in education, psychology, library science and other fields. In recent years each volume has summarized over one thousand reports of reading research.

The reading studies cover a wide area of interest and the IRA summary divides them into five major areas:

1. Teacher preparation and practice
2. Sociology of reading
3. Physiology and psychology of reading
4. Teaching of reading
5. Reading of atypical learners

The major interest of librarians in reading fall into the areas of the sociology and psychology of reading. Other types of studies usually concern issues of interest to people in the field of education.

Because there is such a vast amount of research on reading in North America, this paper will concentrate on one aspect which is of importance to librarians: research in the reading interests of young people.

Methodological Issues

Before looking at the findings of the studies about reading interests, it is necessary to consider how valid these studies are. Most studies have used methodologies which involve asking children about their reading interests. Since it is often difficult to get children to generalize about the types of books which they prefer, there have been many methods devised to obtain valid responses. Each of these methods offers some advantages and some disadvantages in obtaining the information desired.

Forced choice. One method which has often been used is to administer a questionnaire which lists a number of types of books and to ask children to rank these types in order of preference. The children must thus decide whether they prefer mystery, sports stories, poetry and so forth. The weakness of this method is that the categories are pre-selected by the researcher. It might be, for example, that the child looks for a thread of humour through their stories and does not really choose on the basis of whether the content deals with sports or mystery. Or, the identification with the age or sex of the main character may be the determining factor in the choice of a book. Qualifications of this kind do not show up on questionnaires where children choose from a pre-selected list of genres.

Personal interview. Some researchers have interviewed children and asked which of the books they have read have been their favourites. Or they have asked about the types

of books which children like. This format allows for more free comments and modifications by the children and thus allows for more imput by the child. Because of the amount of time needed for personal interviews, however, the sample sizes of studies conducted in this way tend to be small. Also, there is some danger that the presence of the interviewer may affect the answers, as the children strive to respond in ways which they think will be approved.

Diaries. Several studies have required children to keep a diary or other record of books which they have read and their reactions to these books. This method has the advantage of drawing entirely on the child's free choice of materials, unimpeded by the researcher's prior categorization. Unless the children have access to a wide range of different books, however, and the diary is kept over a long enough period of time to allow each child access to any of the books, the data may be severely limited. There is also the problem of inaccurate or incomplete diaries. For the most part this method can be used only with children old enough to record and write comments with ease.

Library records. Studies which examine the borrowing patterns in school or public libraries have the advantage of using a nonobtrusive method of collecting data. The data is drawn from actions taken by the children--books that were actually borrowed--rather than relying on accounts of children's statements about their preferences. The problems which arise with this method are the limited number of books which are available to children in any particular library.

There is no way of knowing whether or not the children would have preferred a different selection of books if these had been available. In the use of this method, as of the previous one, difficulties may also arise when the researcher categorizes the books selected. A book may be recorded, for example, as a selection for an adventure story when in fact the child might have chosen it because the setting was China, or because the child had read other books by the same author. The basis of selection is not evident in the data collected.

Choice of selections read. A few studies have asked children to choose between a number of reading selections presented to them. This has been used to study the effect of particular factors on reading interest. The ethnic background of the characters, for example, has been varied in stories to find out whether or not children prefer to read about characters with the same racial background as themselves. While this method may be appropriate for monitoring the effect of slight variations of this sort, it has the drawback of presenting an artificial set of readings. The children may report no difference in interest between stories which have white middle-class or black lower-class protagonists, as most of the studies have shown, but the racial characteristics of the leading character might still determine a child's choice of a book in a different setting. In real life stories are chosen on the basis of a number of different factors; identical stories which vary only in the

race of the characters do not exist.

Interesting incidents. Some studies have asked children to report the incidents remembered from particular stories they have read or listened to. These incidents are analyzed to find the factors common to widely popular segments, if such common factors can be found.

Recollection of stories. A related methodology is to ask children to report on their favorite stories, books or authors. The recollections can then be grouped together to produce a list of favorite genres, books or authors. The usefulness of such a study depends on having a large sample of children who have been able to choose from a wide variety of different books.

Content analyses. Several recent studies have analyzed the content of children's favourite books in order to discover factors that are related to popularity or to a lack of popularity. When these factors are carefully chosen and related to a theoretical base such as children's psychological development, this type of study offers insights into the basic appeal of many books. Content analysis is time-consuming, of course, and both the selections and the factors studied must be chosen with great care.

Other methodological problems. Many of the methods listed above make no distinction between the relative interest of various books and the interest in reading itself. A child may consistently indicate a preference for mystery stories over sports stories but may in fact have no interest in reading either type of book. A reading preference is

almost meaningless unless it is allied with a reading interest. Very few of the studies reported have dealt with the question of the depth of interest indicated by their results. There is not much point in knowing which type of reading children prefer if in fact they never do any voluntary reading at all.

Despite these methodological problems, there have been a number of studies which give indications of the current state of reading interests in North America. The topics which I will consider are 1) content areas; 2) format; 3) style; 4) psychological factors.

Content Areas

One of the most noticable differences in reading interests is based on age: young children choose different books than older ones do. Not only is this difference the obvious one of easier books, but the content preference changes over time.

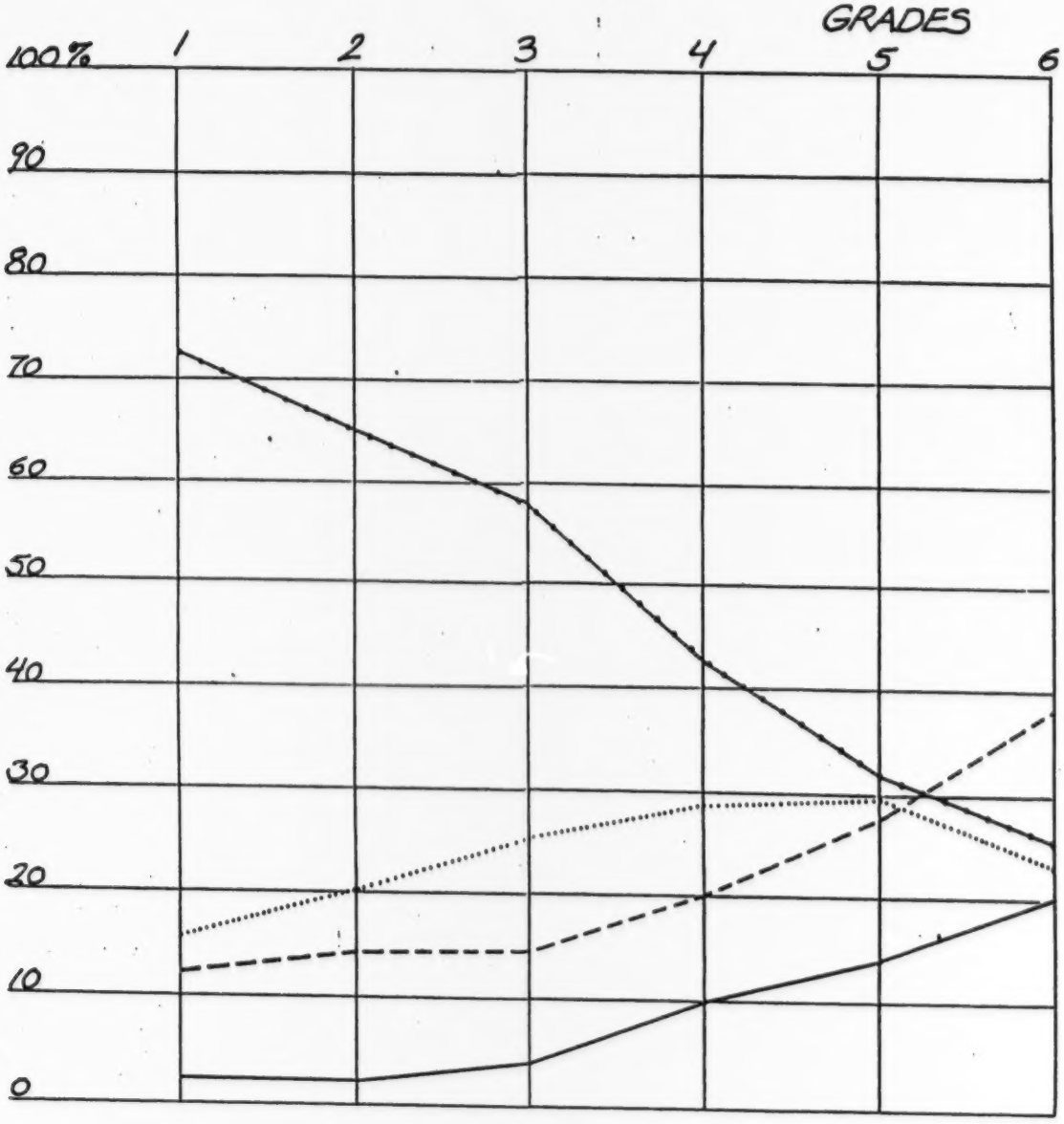
A study in Hawaii shows the complementary rise of realistic fiction and the drop in imaginative literature by grade. As the interest in realistic fiction rises, the reading of imaginative literature declines.[1] (See Table 1)

There have been several studies of types of books chosen by young children. One recent study analyzed the fifty picture-story books chosen as children's favorites.[2] The results indicated several preferences:

1. Children prefer books in which the main character confronts a problem and seeks a solution to it;

READING INTERESTS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN HAWAII

TABLE 1



2. They enjoy episodic plots that reveal the story incident by incident;

3. Plots that focus on characters with different points of view or characters who experience the same things in contrasting ways;

4. Fantasy was preferred, followed by realistic fiction and folktales;

5. Favorite books often make use of animals who are given human characteristics;

6. Children selected humorous books--humor of character or situations;

7. Tomie DePaola was the author/illustrator whose books were most often chosen.

A much smaller proportion of the chosen books were plotless stories, quest stories, and stories of origins.

Using a slightly older age group--second graders--Robert Grover[3] analyzed twenty high circulation books and twenty low circulation books. He found that the high-preference books tended to have real life situations in which negative emotions were portrayed. He also found that the high preference books had a lower readability level than the low preference books, although the boy's choices tended to be at a more difficult level than the girls' choices. So as children move into school, they tend to want more stories set in the real world and also more factual books.

The greatest amount of research on reading interests seems to have been done with children in the middle grades. We are lucky to have a large-scale and careful study done in British Columbia by L.F. Ashley[4] in the early 1970's. This gives us a base line with which to compare more recent studies.

Not surprisingly, Ashley found that the most popular types of stories for the overall group of boys and girls grades 4 through 7 were mysteries and adventure stories.

A 1983 Canadian study[5], which looked at the reading preferences of boys and girls in grades 5, 6 and 7 in Richmond, British Columbia, London and Windsor, Ontario found again the top favorites were mystery and adventure. Sports and fantasy also ranked high with this group. Interestingly, Ashley did not use a fantasy category, so it is not possible to tell how that would have fared with the 1971 group.

Just to show how consistent these preferences are, a 1982 survey of young teenagers in Britain--aged 11 to 14--showed that the top categories they chose were: funny stories, mysteries, ghost/horror, and adventure.[6] (See Table 2)

None of these preferences will come as any surprise to librarians who have been watching what middle-aged children have been borrowing from the library. More important would be insight into why children choose one type of reading over another. In the Summer & Lukasevich study, the authors were able to identify factors which were related to the choice of reading interests. "For both males and females, themes of exitement, danger, thrills, action, monsters, myths, fairy tales, make-believe, ghosts, secrets, detectives, and suspense constitute Factor 1."[5] The underlying dimension here is that many children read for thrills and excitement. If

Table 2

Most Popular Types of Books

Ashley (Can. 1972)	Summer & Lukasevich (Can. 1983)	Bird (Brit. 1981)
Grades 4 - 7	Grades 5 - 7	Ages 11 - 14
1. Mysteries	1. Mystery	1. Funny stories
2. Adventure	2. Adventure	2. Mysteries
3. Ghost stories	3. Sports (Boys) Fantasy (Girls)	3. Ghost/horror
4. Comics	4. Fantasy (Boys) Romance (Girl)	4. Adventure
5. Horse stories	5. Science (Boys) Humour (Girls)	5. Stories about teenagers

it is thrills and excitement that children are looking for when they choose adventure or mystery as their favourites, they might be just as well satisfied with an exciting fantasy or a suspenseful historical novel. It is important to probe the reasons for expressed interests rather than accepting them at face value.

Time after time researchers have discovered that boys and girls have different reading interests. Despite the change in attitudes toward sexism in books over the past ten years, these differences do not seem to have changed greatly, although there is some evidence that sports books are becoming more popular with girls.

One of the most interesting comments on the difference between the sexes are Ashley's findings that boys in grade 4 through 7 consistently ranked love stories as the most disliked type of reading; while girls in the same grades rated war the most disliked. In the three groups which are starred, the most disliked category of one group was one of the four most highly-rated categories of the other sex. By grade 7, love stories had become the top-ranked genre for girls. (See Table 3)

Here again, as in the sports books, we are tempted to speculate that one reason for lack of interest in each of these types of books--war and love--is because the leading characters are likely to be of the opposite sex. Most

Table 3

Most Preferred Category Grades 4 - 7 (Ashley)

	BOYS	GIRLS
Grade 4	Adventure	Horse Stories
Grade 5	Sports	Mysteries
Grade 6	Hardy Boys	Nancy Drew
Grade 7	Sports/Adventure	Love Stories

Table 4

Reading Most Disliked Grades 4 - 7 (Ashley)

	BOYS	GIRLS
Grade 4	Love Stories	War *
Grade 5	Love Stories	War *
Grade 6	Love Stories *	War
Grade 7	Love Stories	War

heroes of war stories are male, the most romances are written from the point of view of the female.

The important question about the differences in the reading interests of boys and girls is whether the differences are innate, revealing some basic psychological differences, or whether girls and boys are socially trained to prefer certain types of material or to see them as appropriate for one sex or the other.

One of the most insightful comments about differences, comes from the Bird study of British children. She writes:

> The girls and boys tended to have slightly different interpretations of 'reality', the main difference appearing to be that, for the girls, reality centred around people, whereas for the boys, reality centred around things or events.6

Both boys and girls said that they liked books which were "real" in some sense and did not mislead them in showing the way in which the world worked, but girls were looking for real characters whose motivations and actions they could believe, while boys were looking for story lines which seemed plausible.

Format

Questions about format are not asked as often as questions about content, but there are indications that format plays an important role in children's choice of books.

The proportion of illustration to print in books influences their popularity. Obviously, the younger readers want more pictures than older readers, but within a specific age groups, the most popular books tend to be the ones with

a higher picture/text ratio.

The most important picture connected with a book is the cover picture. The Bird study in England showed that most children want the cover picture to indicate what the book is about. A cover which has only text, or which has a non-specific illustration does not give a child enough information on which to base a choice, and therefore is not popular.

The length of a book may affect its popularity. Many children prefer books that can be read in two or three sittings, over a period of a few days rather than a few weeks. It is difficult for most children even in the middle and intermediate grades to remember details of the plot of a story read over a period of time.

Size of print is another element which children use to select books. Print which is too small is off-putting. Some children in the British study reported that they scan the first few chapters of a book to see whether large chunks of text appear. If so, they reject the book as being too boring and filled with description. Text set up a dialogue is related to popularity.

There is conflicting evidence about whether or not paperback formats are preferred. Many studies indicate that children choose paperbacks over hardcovers; others show that the format makes little difference.

Literary Style

Children are reported to be insensitive to literary style. This has been tested by research which asked children to group together the works of the same author. In this study, preadolescents could not distinguish style. They grouped pieces by theme or content only.[7] This lack of awareness of differences of literary style, however, may not be the same as being insensitive to style. There are several aspects of style which appear to be related to children's choices of specific books.

Readability level is one aspect of style which has been shown to be related to preference as in the study of 2nd grade children, which I mentioned earlier--the high preference books tended to have lower readability levels than the low preference books. Studies of award-winning books--the Newbery medal books-compared with very popular books shows that the Newbery winners have more difficult reading levels. On the whole books which are easier to read tend to be more popular.

Other aspects of style which may have an effect on children's choice would be sentence construction, vocabulary, and figurative language. Dr. Mavis Cariou at the University of Toronto has recently completed an interesting comparison of three groups of books--Newbery award winners, books chosen by children as their favorites, and popular series books such as Nancy Drew. In looking at these groups of books for differences in language, she found that the children's choice books differed significantly and consis-

tently from the Newbery award novels on every syntax and metaphor variable except the number of adjective clauses. The Newbery books use more clauses, longer more complex sentences and more figurative language. It would appear from this, that children in the middle grades prefer novels that use simpler language structures and fewer metaphors than the books chosen by adults for exemplary literary style. What is not known, is whether the content conveyed in Newbery award novels is also more difficult, and if so what effect that has on the preferences of children. As Dr. Cariou writes:

> "Subtle themes, highly individualized characters, and complicated plots might well have required syntactic structures that condensed thought units into modifiers, nominalizations, and coordinated forms so that new relationships could be conveyed. The popular series novel, as conventional literature, would be less likely than the Newbery award or children's choice novels to express new concepts or subtle themes.8

In the search for a simple, clear style, some writers have sacrificed complexity of character, plot and themes. In the long run this may defeat the purpose by turning children away from reading entirely. Books which offer no challenge, no new insights, do not hold children's interests for long.

Psychological Aspects

Perhaps the most neglected area of children's reading interests, is the psychological meaning that reading holds for children. Bruno Bettelheim has written of the importance of engaging a child's deep needs in the stories and

books that are presented. He says that the major task of human being is to find meaning in life. And he goes on to say:

> "To find deeper meaning, one must become able to transcend the narrow confines of a self-centered existence and believe that one will make a significant contribution to life--if not right now, then at some future time."[9]

In criticizing much of the children's literature available today, he writes, "The worst feature of these children's books is that they cheat the child of what he ought to gain from the experience of literature: access to deeper meaning, and that which is meaningful to him at his stage of development."[10]

Norma Schlager, a researcher who combined a background in children's literature and in developmental psychology, tries to account for the reasons why children choose both Nancy Drew and Tom Sawyer as favourite books although the two diverge widely in literature quality. Her answer is that "Children's choices in literature are not made on a conscious level ... The key to [their reasons] lies in the stage of development in which a child can be found."[11] She examines this idea through looking at the most and least popular of the Newbery Award books. Island of the Blue Dolphins she suggests is popular because it is concerned with the young person's need to develop competence outside of the family protection. Karena the heroine of Island is physically isolated from her tribe. She survives despite dangers and without losing her moral perspective. Although her plunge into independence is far more severe than that of

the average child, the way in which she copes with her plight has deep meaning in relation to every child's struggle to assess his or her own ability to be independent.

In constrast to Island, one of the least popular of the Newbery books is Dobry which tells the story of a boy who wishes to become an artist. During the story, the hero jumps from early childhood into adolescence. Neither of these stages are ones which the 7 to 12 year old reader at whom the book is aimed can understand and relate to his or her own life.

Much of the interest in adventure and mystery stories may be because these stories deal with independent children who solve problems and cope with emergencies without the intervention of adults. In addition to being exciting, these books give the child a vicarious experience of being independent and in charge of events.

Future Directions

How useful have the studies of reading interest been to librarians? Even though they have identified the types of books which have the widest general appeal, they have not given us much insight into the reasons for this appeal. Instead of developing longer lists of the kinds of books which children choose, researchers might spend more time probing into the reasons for choices. The few studies which have attempted to relate developmental psychology to reading interests have given us some insight into why children prefer one book rather than another. This kind of insight

would help writers, publishers and librarians to make available books which children can understand and to which they will respond deeply.

We need to develop more theoretically based research methods which probe the reasons for children's likes and dislikes in reading. In-depth interviews with smaller numbers of children may produce more knowledge than some of the large-scale questionnaire studies have done. Librarians need to work with psychologists and teachers who can provide clues to the deeper meanings which particular books have for children.

At the same time that research continues on the reading interests of children, we must be careful not to base our collection building on a popularity poll. Each reader is an individual with particular tastes and interests. Some books which do not appeal to wide numbers of children may still be greatly loved and appreciated by a minority of children. These books too should be made available for the readers who want them.

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IFLA's Round Table on Research in Reading

An introduction

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Paul Kaegbein: IFLA's Round Table on Research in Reading.
An Introduction

Abstract

A short report is given about the establishment of this Round Table within the Section on Library Theory and Research, its aims and goals as well as the results of its first meeting in Spring 1985 which include some projects within the future work of the Round Table.

Since a lot of years, problems of research in reading has been given some priority in the work of the IFLA Section on Library Theory and Research. As it is one of the Section's objectives as formulated in IFLA's Medium Term Programme[1] to promote communication and cooperation among researchers in library and information science as well as to improve the contacts between researchers and practitioners, the organization of international seminars on research subjects has been one primary task of the Section.[2]

In almost all seminars held under the auspices of the Section, papers on research in reading have been presented and discussed. This was foremost the case in the International Seminar on "Book and Library in Society"[3] which took place in Poland in 1980, organized by the Institute of Book and Reading of the Polish National Library[4] and in the International Seminar on "The Role of Books and Reading in the Cultural Development"[5] which was arranged by the Lenin State Library in Moscow in 1984.[6] But also other seminars of the Section, in Istanbul[7] in 1982, in Berlin[8] in 1983 and in Tampere in 1985 included research in reading in the topics discussed.

The response on these activities of the Section showed a widespread and continuous interest in research in reading. On the other side, the Section's activities always depend on the knowlege and the engagement of experts who can only take over limited responsibilities within the Standing Committee of the Section. The changing composition of the Standing Committee is not suited to carry on the task of continuous work in the field of research in reading.

One of the results of the Seminar on "The Role of Books and Reading in the Cultural Development" was the proposal to establish a specific Round Table on Research in Reading within the Section. In its meeting on May 25, 1984, the Standing Committee agreed unanimously to establish this Round Table according to art. 22.1 and 22.2 of the Statutes of IFLA.[9]

According to no. 10.1.2 of IFLA's Rules of Procedures, the Standing Committee formulated the following terms of reference

for the Round Table on Research in Reading:

- to promote and advance research in reading and studies on readers;
- to provide a forum for comparative studies in these fields.

The Coordinating Board of the IFLA Division on Education and Research to which the Section on Library Theory and Research belongs and the Professional Board of IFLA agreed with the establishment of the Round Table on Research in Reading during the IFLA Conference in Nairobi at their meetings of August 19 and 25, 1984, respectively.

The new Round Table on Research in Reading intends to stimulate interest and research in the field of reading and readers, connected with libraries or not, as an integral part of library science and research. Within IFLA's Medium-Term Programme 1986-1991, in consultation with the appropriate IFLA professional groups, the Round Table will

1. cooperate closely with international associations and national research institutions, libraries and experts in this field;
2. promote specific research projects by encouraging appropriate institutions to sponsor them and by bringing together experts from various countries engaged in specific tasks;
3. promote international seminars of experts in the field of research in reading in order to provide a basis for comparative studies on the international level.[10]

The first meeting of the Executive Committee of the Round Table on Research in Reading took place in Tampere in April, 1985. Members of the Executive Committee are at the time being the following experts in this field: Ferenc Gereben (Budapest, Hungary), Helena Kolářová-Pálková (Bratislava, CSSR), Jadwiga Kozodziejska (Warsaw, Poland), Bryan L.G. Luckham (Manchester, United K ngdom), Valeria D. Stelmach (Moscow, USSR - Chairman), Leena Teinilä (Tampere, Finland), Robert C. Usherwood (Sheffield, United Kingdom - Secretary)

Other prospective members of the Executive Committee have been nominated already with the view also of the participation of developing regions of the world.

The first professional task of the new Round Table was to organize its open meeting during the IFLA Conference in Chicago. Besides this introduction, the following topics have been scheduled for presentation:

- Research programs of the youth reading in the Socialist countries (by Valeria Stelmach, Moscow);
- The research in reading in the ČSSR (by Helena Kolářová-Pálková, Bratislava);
- Current research on the reading of young people in North America (by Adele M. Fasick, Toronto).

For the open meeting of the Round Table during the IFLA Conference in Tokyo in 1986 one topic of broader interest was mentioned to be dealt with in a paper on the process of learning to read when using ideographic scripts.

Two other opportunities for active participation of the Round Table on Research in Reading will be the International Seminar on "Modern Research in the Development of Libraries and Their Users" scheduled for Bratislava in October 1986 and the International Conference on "Research in Reading Habits" planned for Warsaw in 1987. In both cases, the organizers of these meetings promote papers presented by members of this new Round Table of IFLA.

Projects envisaged by the Round Table have to be discussed more in detail during the next meetings. Here also the project recommendations of the International Seminar on "The Role of Books and Reading in Cultural Development" will be included. It was agreed already to prepare an International Directory of Experts in Research in Reading.

On behalf of the Section on Library Theory and Research and the Round Table on Research in Reading, a collective volume with the title "Studies on Research in Reading and Libraries. Approaches and Results form Several Countries" shall be published in the series "IFLA Publications" in 1986. It will comprise a selection of high-level research-oriented papers of standing value for further research.

Experts in the field of research in reading interested in contribute actively to the aims of the new Round Table are asked to notify this in writing to its Chairman or its Secretary respectively the addresses of which are given below:

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[1] IFLA. Medium-Term Programme 1986-1991 (The Hague: IFLA 1985) p. 50.

[2] Russell Bowden and Paul Kaegbein: The activities of the IFLA Division on Education and Research during the years 1979-1983 (in: IFLA Journal 10 (1984) pp. 182-187) p. 184.

[3] Książka i biblioteka w społeczeństwie. Materiały międzynarodowego seminarium Warszawa-Radziejowice, czerwiec 1980. Warszawa: Biblioteka Narodowa, Instytut Książki i Czytelnictwa 1982. 343 p.

[4] See the reports given in: IFLA Journal 6 (1980) pp. 372-379 (Paul Kaegbein and Diann Rusch); Bibliotekarz 47 (1980) pp. 130-131 (Jadwiga Kozłodziejska); Buch und Bibliothek 32 (1980) pp. 696-697 (Heinz Steinberg); Bulletin des bibliothèques de France 25 (1980) pp. 604-605; Könyvtáros 30 (1980) pp. 674-678 (István Kamarás); Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen 94 (1980) pp. 531-533 (Helmut Göhler); Bibliothek 5 (1981) pp. 78-82 (Diann D. Rusch); Bibliotekovedenie i bibliografija za rubežom 83 (1981) pp. 69-79 (V.D. Stelmach); Przegląd biblioteczny 49 (1981) pp. 231-237 (Jadwiga Kozłodziejska).

[5] The proceedings of this Seminar will be published in Russian at the end of the year 1985.

[6] See the reports given in: Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen 98 (1984) pp. 459-461 (Klaus Plötz); IFLA Journal 10 (1984) pp. 315-316 (Paul Kaegbein). More reports are prepared for publication in the ČSSR, Poland and USSR.

[7] Değişik Ülkelerde Kütüphane Öğretimi. (Seminer: 25 Şubat 1982.) Hazurlayan: Meral Alpay. Istanbul 1983. 76 p.

[8] Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen 97 (1983) pp. 339-352, 389-393.

[9] IFLA. Statutes. Rules of Procedures (The Hague: IFLA 1979) p. 13-14. - See also: IFLA Journal 11 (1985) p. 59.

[10] IFLA. Medium-Term Programme 1986-1991 (The Hague: IFLA 1985) p. 51.

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THE ADOLESCENT READING TRANSITION: TOWARDS THE DEFINITION OF A PROBLEM

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THE ADOLESCENT READING TRANSITION:

TOWARDS THE DEFINITION OF A PROBLEM

The purpose of this paper is to explore some possible issues related to the reading of young people which might form the basis of a comparative international research investigation under the auspices of the International Federation of Library Associations.

Research into library use and reading, especially of books, has advanced quite rapidly in the last two decades in the European countries. They had much ground to cover in the wake of the lead given by North American colleagues, in the previous two decades. Much of this derived from the stimulus given by professional colleagues in Chicago, both at the University and by librarians themselves. Not surprisingly the first steps in each country were confined to national boundaries. In fact many studies in Britain were quite local in character, looking at library and book use in particular towns and areas.

The resources for large national surveys have not readily been forthcoming for public library research in Western Europe although some valuable information has been derived from commercial support, particularly book publishers. National broadcasting organisations have also contributed because of their interest in media consumption and leisure time use.[1] In the 1970's the attention of many of us became alerted to the considerable efforts put into book and library research in Eastern Europe.[2] These endeavours reached wider audiencies through the IFLA supported conferences on Books and Reading held in Warsaw 1980 and Moscow 1984.[3]

It has long been the concern of this writer that despite the accumulation of records of public library use in all our countries that so little has been done to compare or draw lessons from that experience of a

sufficiently systematic or statistical nature. Perhaps the computerisation of records which now proceeds apace will make it easier. But for that to happen we need to define suitable parameters and criteria, and above all the worthwhile questions to be explored.

After the Moscow 1984 conference a number of us met informally and concluded that a specific topic area could be defined as an exploration and starting point for research collaboration. There was little difficulty in identifying the apparent decline in book use by young people, teenagers, as being worthy of interest and most relevant to librarians. At short notice this paper has been drafted therefore to take note of selected research which was readily available to the writer, to see what concerns that research expresses and to identify possible useful further issues which could be investigated comparatively.

In total there has been an enormous amount of research on young peoples reading, perhaps more than that on adults. It is impossible to summarise more than a small fraction here and it is considered better to clarify principles and perspectives rather than list empirical findings. However, some data can usefully illustrate the points made. It is not surprising that much attention has been given to childrens reading since it both illuminates the intellectual development of the young but also is the means whereby the horizons and potential of the child is enlarged. Schooling in all countries is currently heavily oriented to the written word. In many countries a literary tradition, of a classical nature, is still very influential and very resistant to scientific or empirical studies. Children too, in fact students of all ages, are captive to some extent and thus readily available for research enquiries.

However there arises a discontinuity because many leave school to enter employment, or help in home or farm, before their basic intellectual

and emotional development is complete. Our school records therefore cease in many cases at 14 or a year or two after, even in industrialised countries when reading patterns and library use have not stabilised. No substantial longitudinal study is known to the writer which follows a cohort of young people through from say age 10 to age 20 in their reading experience. Large scale surveys have certainly been undertaken at specific points in time with a wide range of ages so that some synchronous comparison is possible. But frequently for convenience or statistical requirements particular ages are aggregated so that little year by year contrast can be seen. Thus we get 8-11 year olds compared with 12-15 or 16-19 when so rapid is the rate of development in adolescence that such aggregations blur crucial processes and stages.

For example, one of the most competent researches in Britain, by Whitehead and colleagues in the mid-1970's, had a sample of 7839 school pupils.[4] However, combining respondents into three age-ranges diminished the possibility of a year by year analysis. Similarly, Norvell in his mammoth study of reading interests and preferences of 5000 American pupils published in 1973 confined its age-comparisons to two very large ranges, 11-15 and 15-18.[5] At another extreme Maconie in New Zealand in 1969 collected data from 4000 fifteen year olds only.[6] Of course such restrictions may be appropriate to the objectives of the particular investigations but they mean opportunities for analyses missed. I am unaware of secondary analyses of such large data bases being made.

So far as studies of library use are concerned one problem may arise from the structure of the services offered to the public. Most, if not all, national library systems recognise children's libraries as necessary separate identities. They have usually built up cadres of skilled and committed professional staff. It might well be argued that the friendly, lively

atmosphere of the public libraries for juveniles epitomises what all good libraries should be. But such services often seem self-contained. Do the records, the expertise, the resources carry over to the teenage and later years? There seems not quite the continuing relationship which is a characteristic of the school system. So reading and library use in the later teens seems to be the concern of no one in particular. But if many young people develop more slowly and are so vulnerable to the competing attractions of electronic media, commercial entertainment, ideological extremism, and other temptations of youth, is it enough to assume that a basic grounding in reading and book use suffices for the complex technological age in which we now live? The absence of library statistics about or specific service to the teenager suggests a failure, either to find an answer or to ask the question.

An early priority then would be research which traces in more detail the stages of young peoples development year by year either through sufficiently large samples with sub-group comparison or by a longitudinal study which follows a smaller group through. Continuity of support, consistent record-keeping and willing cooperation of subjects will make the latter more demanding. It might be argued that since the broad trends are already known, further detail is unnecessary. The trouble is that the evidence is not always consistent. Most researchers seem to record a reduction in the proportion reading a book as the teens advance.[7] But Jenkinson did not find this writing in 1938.[8] Wilkins in a large scale study of adolescents in 1955 in Britain found a major reduction in reading later on, between age 15 and 19.[9]

Another area of disagreement is the changing emphasis on fiction and non-fiction. Whitehead, and librarians at Sheffield, saw a declining interest in non-fiction in the mid-teens whereas Jenkinson, Bristol librarians and Norvell

differ.[10] The differences may possibly be due to the differences in samples, their location or classification of responses but the picture has sufficiency inconsistency for a more authoritative investigation.

However, although clarification of patterns and trends is important there are more important arguments for new research initiatives. One obtains an impression in examining earlier work of the emphasis given to certain disciplines and perspectives. One of the strongest traditions is the interest in reading competence and how this can be enhanced by alternative teaching methods. One of the most influential figures here has been Ruth Strang, particularly arising from her early work Exploration in Reading Patterns.[11] Another approach gives most attention to the interests and satisfactions of the young reader. Here one may mention Norvell, and Friedlaender in the USA.[12] More recently Nicholas Tucker emphasises his objective to use psychoanalytical theory as a way of understanding unconscious or semi-conscious fears and desires in childrens reading.[13]

On the other hand concern with aesthetic sensitivity and taste is also a focus. Here we have Harding's work in analysing a child's reading, especially of fiction and poetry, as one of value-defining and establishing standards.[14]

Some evidence from the growth of interest and skill in reading, and the choice of subjects and themes in books can be used to explore the three perspectives mentioned above. But unless the opinion and attitude of the reader can be elicited then the researcher or analyst can only infer the developments from the general patterns or individual preferences revealed. Unfortunately theory and prctice are not always closely married. The skilled observer can however produce valuable insights into the reading of the young, of great interest and practical value. Tucker's work has been widely influential in Britain in helping librarians and teachers to

understand the potential of the book choices that young people make. Similarly from the USA, Carlsen's writing on the reading preferences of the teenage reader seem to hit a sympathetic and correct interpretation.[15]

A further perspective may be suggested in more sociological terms. If one accepts that reading is in part a reflection of development, then it expresses an increasing social awareness and standing. Whitehead has suggested that reading fiction can be an evaluative response,not just a passive acceptance or escape.[16] Kamaras and myself noted in studying adult readers, that some, albeit a small minority, took a more judgemental, even combative approach towards the writer and the book.[17] How far might the search for and assertion of an identity by young people be observed in their motivation towards and perceived function of their reading?

It is suggested therefore that a reading research project should not only describe the patterns and trends of reading of the young but attempt to clarify the part it plays in their lives and world-views. Whilst one does not reject the contribution which other disciplines and perspectives can make to reading and library use research, it has been said on more than one occasion that sociologists have contributed too little to this in the past. In more recent years they have been much engrossed with the more glamorous electronic media although in earlier times, particularly in the USA, Schramm and Berelson made notable contributions in laying a basic descriptive framework.[18]

It is suggested therefore that any comparative studies of reading and book use should include questions which enable young people to demonstrate the extent of external pressures and influences upon them from, professional, parent, and peer sources in their choices as well as the mass media or other impersonal forces and structures. They should be asked how they classify

and define their reading rather than the researcher imposing traditional genres and classes. It would also be valuable to know how they use the material read, to what extent for example is the knowledge or feeling shared with others as a basis for conversation or other exchange. In the past reading has often been seen as a personal experience, perhaps solitary. Yet several researchers have commented on how sociable and active are book-readers, e.g. Hajda.[19] Reading since 1945 has probably become more fragmented and instrumental. Reactions to it are less uniform in any category of persons. Young people in their search for identity, for a place in society, are therefore particularly likely to show this fragmentation.

Some individual reading case-studies could also therefore be employed to reveal the complexity of choice and response to contemporary reading by the young.

What would be the practical value of such investigations, since in a world of scarce resources one has to justify the effort of new research? I do not dare to suggest there are obvious long term benefits since the time-scale in which all of us operates seems to shrink steadily. However, we need to know how to present the world of literature, the written word, whilst it is still a significant medium to the young. How to advertise, to direct attention, to indicate its potential, to clarify its place in a world of competing media is vital if we are to enable the written word to continue to fulfil its potential. And who better than for the young whose tastes are also a very powerful factor, especially in the periodical and pocket-book market, but especially if as the rising generation they are to sustain a cultural value, an artifact which we know from experience has given so much to human society, and whose day has surely not yet run. We cannot carry this torch alone, it will only continue to burn if we hand it on in good condition to a new generation that will care and nurture it.

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